

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CU-04 AID-05 CIAE-00
COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 PM-05
H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 HEW-04
TRSE-00 OMB-01 /111 W
-----011528 162027Z /40

R 161755Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY LISBON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5079
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMCONSUL OPORTO
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
USMISSION USNATO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
COMUSFORAZ

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BRUSSELS ALSO FOR USMISSION EC

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PO
SUBJECT: PUBLIC WORKER AND TEACHER DISPUTES STILL UNRESOLVED

REF: LISBON 1827
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SUMMARY: THE RECENT NATIONWIDE STRIKES OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE
AND TEACHERS' UNIONS FOCUSED ATTENTION ON LABOR PROBLEMS IN
THE PUBLIC SECTOR, BUT RESOLUTION OF THE DISPUTES IS NOT IN
PROSPECT. THE TEACHERS' STRIKE WAS NEAR TOTAL IN MANY AREAS,
BUT ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL ESTIMATES THE PUBLIC SERVICE STRIKE
FELL CONSIDERABLY SHORT OF UNION CLAIMS. CONTINUED

AGITATION IN BOTH AREAS INCLUDING POSSIBLE STRIKE ACTION IS LIKELY. END SUMMARY.

1. STRIKES CAUSE CONCERN: THE MARCH 10 TEACHER AND PUBLIC SERVICE WORKER STRIKES PASSED WITHOUT INCIDENT BUT WERE SUBJECT OF SOMEWHAT MORE THAN ORDINARY GOVERNMENT CONCERN. POLICE PRESENCE AT MANY WORK PLACES BROUGHT UNION CHARGES OF GOVERNMENT HARRASSMENT. THE UNUSUAL DEPLOYMENT OF POLICE IS BEING ATTRIBUTED TO GOP BELIEF THAT THE PUBLIC SERVICE STRIKE IN PARTICULAR WAS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. EFFORTS BY THE COMMUNIST PRESS TO LINK THE TWO STRIKES AND TO BILL THE STRIKE ACTION AS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT SINCE THE 1974 REVOLUTION PROBABLY CONTRIBUTED TO OFFICIAL UNEASINESS.

2. COINCIDENCES AND DISTINCTIONS: WHILE THE STRIKES WERE NOT CONNECTED THERE ARE SUFFICIENT COINCIDENCES IN BOTH DISPUTES TO MAKE THE COMMUNIST ATTEMPT AT LINKAGE VIABLE. BOTH STRIKES OCCURRED IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND WERE HELD ON THE SAME DAY. OF MORE SIGNIFICANCE IS THE FACT THAT THE MINISTRIES INVOLVED, EDUCATION AND CULTURE (MEC) AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM (MRA), HAVE BEEN WILLING TO "DISCUSS" BUT NOT TO "NEGOTIATE" WITH THE TEACHER AND PUBLIC SERVICE UNIONS. THE GOVERNMENT IS UNWILLING TO NEGOTIATE PUBLIC UNION DEMANDS FOR FEAR IT WOULD WEAKEN THE GOVERNMENT'S DECREE POWERS AND POLITICIZE THE MANAGEMENT OF ITS EMPLOYEE RELATIONS IN THE PROCESS. ALSO, THERE ARE THOUSANDS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF TEACHERS AS WELL AS PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS WHO ARE CONTRACT EMPLOYEES SEEKING PERMANENT STATUS. THEREFORE, CAREER REFORM AND JOB SECURITY FIGURE IN DEMANDS OF BOTH UNIONS. BEYOND THESE SHARED CONCERNS, HOWEVER, THE TWO DISPUTES HAD LITTLE IN COMMON; DIRECT COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE CGTP-AFFILIATED PUBLIC SERVICE UNION AND THE INDEPENDENT TEACHERS UNIONS IS MARGINAL.

3. TEACHER DISCONTENT IS WIDESPREAD: THE NATION'S TEACHERS, PARTICULARLY AT THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVELS, HAVE BEEN PRESSING THE GOP FOR MANY MONTHS TO NEGOTIATE GRIEVANCES PRIMARILY STEMMING FROM AN OVERBURDENED PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM BADLY IN NEED OF REFORM. THE MEC IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON REFORM MEASURES. HOWEVER, THE EXTENT OF REFORM WILL BE GOVERNED IN PART BY THE SIZE OF THE MEC SHARE OF THE NATIONAL BUDGET CURRENTLY UNDER DEBATE AND WILL PROBABLY FALL FAR SHORT OF TEACHER UNION EXPECTATIONS. ONE OF THE BASIC PROBLEMS IS THE CURRENT GLUT OF TEACHERS. AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR THERE WERE 36,500 APPLICANTS FOR 26,000 VACANCIES. ANOTHER SOURCE OF CONTROVERSY IS THAT MANY TEACHERS NOW TEACHING ARE NOT FULLY QUALIFIED. MOST OF THE LESS QUALIFIED WERE FOISTED

ON THE SYSTEM DURING THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY 1974-75 PERIOD.
THE HIGH URBAN CONCENTRATION OF TEACHERS AND THEIR
UNWILLINGNESS TO LOCATE IN RURAL AREAS ADDS TO THE PROBLEM.

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H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 HEW-04
TRSE-00 OMB-01 /111 W

-----011549 162026Z /40

R 161755Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY LISBON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5080
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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THERE ARE MANY MORE ISSUES AT STAKE WHICH HAVE BEEN THE
SUBJECT OF MANY "DISCUSSIONS" BETWEEN UNION AND MEC
OFFICIALS IN RECENT MONTHS. THE FOUR TEACHER UNIONS
HAVE INDICATED THAT THEY ARE TIRED OF "DISCUSSING" AND
ARE NOW PRESSING FOR FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS.
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4. PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS: IN ADDITION TO CAREER REFORM, WHICH IS SUBJECT OF A PROJECTED LAW PROPOSED BY THE MINISTRY OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM AND SENT TO THE UNIONS ON MARCH 15, PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS ARE ALSO PUSHING FOR WAGE INCREASES. THE GOP HAS OFFERED A WAGE PACKAGE WHICH AVERAGES 17 PERCENT. BUT THE UNION CLAIMS THAT THE LION'S SHARE WILL GO TO SUPERGRADE EMPLOYEES. EVEN SO THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEMAND AND OFFER IS NOT GREAT. THIS AND THE FACT THAT THE PUBLIC SERVICE UNIONS RECENTLY VOTED FOR AFFILIATION TO THE COMMUNIST-DOMINATED CGTP HAVE PROMPTED CHARGES OF POLITICAL MOTIVATION FOR THE STRIKE.

5. COMMENT: THE PUBLIC SERVICE UNIONS HAVE CLAIMED 80 PERCENT ADHEREENCE TO THEIR STRIKE WHILE THE GOP ESTIMATES 26 PERCENT. BOTH FIGURES SEEM EXAGGERATED BUT EVEN SPLITTING THE DIFFERENCE AND CONSIDERING THAT THE STRIKE WAS HELD ON FRIDAY, AN INVITATION TO A LONG WEEKEND, INDICATES THAT THE PUBLIC SERVICE UNIONS HAVE LIMITED STRIKE CAPACITY. HOWEVER, CONSIDERABLE WORKER FRUSTRATION REMAINS; MORE AGITATION, IF SHORT OF STRIKE ACTION, CAN BE EXPECTED. ON THE TEACHER SIDE, FUTURE UNION ACTION IS ASSURED. THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT TEACHERS WILL REFUSE TO GRADE STUDENTS FOR THE PRESENT QUARTER WHICH ENDS THIS WEEK, AND FUTURE STRIKE ACTION CANNOT BE RULED OUT. THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE HARD PRESSED TO MEET DEMANDS OF BOTH TEACHERS AND PUBLIC SERVICE WORKERS AS ITS AUSTERITY PROGRAM EVOLVES.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TEACHERS, LABOR DISPUTES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LISBON01968
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780117-1036
Format: TEL
From: LISBON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780361/aaaabzhw.tel
Line Count: 203
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 881e4bc6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 LISBON 1827
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3311401
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PUBLIC WORKER AND TEACHER DISPUTES STILL UNRESOLVED
TAGS: ELAB, PO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/881e4bc6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014